

Bill would let voters with disabilities sign with stamps

If state Rep. Andy Schor has his way, voting will be uneventful the next time Lee Abramson casts his ballot.

The East Lansing man — unable to hold a pen because of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis — won't have to vote twice or have an election official pay him a visit. He'll simply sign his ballot envelope with his signature stamp and know his vote will be counted.

Schor took action Friday by proposing to change election law that narrowly dictates how voters with disabilities must sign their absentee ballots.

As I wrote in October 2012, Abramson had his general election absentee ballot rejected because he signed the envelope with the signature stamp



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he uses for personal papers and finances. He voted a second time to conform with the law — marking an "X" with his own hand as required — but raised objections as to why an anonymous mark was more acceptable than his stamped name.

It was an objection noted by Schor.

"It seems something dumb in the law that could be fixed, so I'm trying to do it," said Schor, a Democrat in the 68th district.

Seeking input

Once Schor learned of Abramson's issue, he consulted with local clerks and state election officials about adding signature stamps to the law.

He said there were no convincing arguments that signing a ballot with a signature stamp invited fraud any more than a handmade mark. Schor said some have argued that someone could steal a signature stamp and use it without authorization. But most people have a pens and can write an "X" even more easily, he said.

Schor certainly found a sympathetic ear in East Lansing City Clerk Marie McKenna, whose first husband lived with ALS before his death. While bound to follow the law,

she believed Abramson should be able to sign with a stamp. He had, after all, taken the step to preserve his original signature. Reducing that signature to an "X" seemed like stealing some of his dignity, she said.

McKenna pushed the issue with election officials and received permission to allow Abramson to use his stamp as long as she or a deputy witnessed it. Schor's bill, if passed, would make such a step unnecessary.

"I couldn't be more thrilled," McKenna said. "I've offered to send a letter, testify — whatever it takes. I have a personal stake and I think we all should. We should not deny individuals the choice of how they want to express their signature."

Thankful mom

Lee's mother, Janet Abramson, on Tuesday emailed Schor to thank him for introducing the legislation, which she said could help voters disabled by blindness, paralysis, tremors, accident or combat.

"It's an improvement over the statement that a person can 'make his mark' " Janet Abramson said. "That implies illiteracy, not physical disability. That seems to make quite an assumption about a person's ability level."

The Michigan Department of State worked with Schor on the bill and supports its passage, spokesman Fred Woodhams said in an email.

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